

'PRIVATE IS IN SECRET FREE': HOBBS AND LOCKE ON THE LIMITS OF TOLERATION, ATHEISM AND HETERODOXY

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'Nothing sooner [gives] a Man the character of an Atheist than being an enemy to Priestcraft' wrote Mathew Tindal, one time Catholic, Fellow of All Souls, and infamously author of the *Rights of the Christian Church* (1706) and later *Christianity as old as the Creation* (1730)¹. A brief examination of Tindal's massive *Rights of the Christian Church* will serve as a means of introducing the themes of this paper the apparent tensions between Hobbist erastianism and Lockean toleration. On the one hand Tindal went to great lengths to insist that the state had complete authority over all church affairs and officers, while also maintaining that 'everyone when capable, is to chuse his own Church'. The magistrate had the duty to punish evil, viciousness and superstition. Importantly, especially for a man accused repeatedly of heterodoxy, Tindal enfranchised the civil punishment of any who denied the 'being of God' and those 'who make the notion useless, by disowning his providential care of mankind'. Blasphemy was a civil crime because preserving the 'awe and reverence of divinity' was a fundamental tool for securing order. Almost in the same breath Tindal condemned persecution and upheld the principles of toleration 'as long as the publick sustains no damage'.² Explicitly transferring or extending Lockean consensual arguments about the origins of civil authority Tindal argued that all religious authority was created by popular acknowledgement. Contrary to the claims of high churchmen like Henry Dodwell, priesthood had no 'indelible character': people might chose their 'spiritual conductors' in the same way as they selected a 'lawyer, physician, brewer, baker' for themselves.³ In the course of condemning false doctrine, ceremonies and institutions Tindal managed to combine Hobbes' polemic against the malign influence of Aristotelian 'jargon' with Locke's epistemological themes from the *Essay*.⁴

It may be worth standing back from the details of Tindal's text to highlight the possible contradictions of his combination of erastian and tolerationist arguments. The commonplaces of historiography have (until recently) consistently contrasted the authoritarian themes of Books III and IV of *Leviathan* (1651) with the permissive arguments of the *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689): indeed the labels of illiberal and liberal are still assigned with regularity to the respective authors and arguments.⁵ What this paper intends to do is explore the contrast and continuities between Hobbes' and Locke's ecclesiologies and in some sense to examine why and how a man like Tindal saw no problem in bringing the two positions together. This examination will ultimately, echoing some of the recent suggestions of Tuck and Ryan, suggest a conceptual convergence of ideas in Hobbes and Locke. It will also question the still persistent inclination to assess, especially *LCT*, as contributing (either successfully or only partially) to the philosophical defence of 'liberalism'.⁶ In part this enquiry will attempt to suggest that by exploring the relationship between Hobbes and Locke it may be possible to place the *LCT* in a very different context from those usually suggested: put boldly, one point of this discussion will be to propose that by exploring the *LCT*, and importantly contextualising the arguments with not only *LCT2* and *LCT3*, but also with Locke's own

¹ Tindal Rights 415.

² Tindal Rights 12-13, 15-17.

³ Tindal Rights 364, 240.

⁴ Tindal Rights 221-224.

⁵ See Horton, Mendus (1991); Mendus (1988, 1989). The *Letters Concerning Toleration* will be abbreviated to *LCT* and identified by addition of an arabic numeral (ie *LCT1*).

⁶. See Ryan (1988); Tuck (1990, 1992, 1993). For a rebuttal of Tuck see Milton (1993).

views on heterodoxy, heresy and unbelief found in the correspondence and elsewhere, that his views on toleration were rooted not in a conviction about the value of intellectual diversity but in a radical hostility to priestcraft. This hostility to commonplace conceptions of priesthood, importantly encompassed both Catholic and Protestant understandings: Locke's anticlericalism was profound. Indeed it will be implicit in this argument that Locke's anticlericalism should lead historians to rethink his proposed relationships with either Dissent or Latitudinarianism.⁷ Although, as will be argued below, Locke's views on toleration did originate in a 'theological' context, the ecclesiological implications of this position place him outside of the precincts of orthodoxy and much closer to the discourses of radical heterodoxy.⁸

The origins of this paper came from reflection upon how Hobbes and Locke reacted to the problems of the Confessional State⁹, or what John Owen termed the 'Church-State'.¹⁰ For example, central to the Hobbist agenda was the problem of who controlled the public meaning of language and doctrine. For Hobbes ensuring that language was free from the corrupting influence of priestly obfuscation was crucial to establishing civic order: the misapplication, misunderstanding and manipulation of both civic and religious language was one of the most dangerous forms of social corrosion. Consequently Hobbes' ecclesiological provisions lodged the power of the public determination of meaning in the civic sovereign. Extending the Protestant language of the Royal Supremacy to its most radically erastian conclusions Hobbes' prescriptions established a complete uniformity of doctrine; and most emphatically a uniformity of doctrine and worship that was imposed from above on the authority of the unchallengeable power of sovereignty. Priests and laity alike were subject to this uniformity. Although more attention will be paid below to the subtleties and structure of Hobbes' response to the problem of religion the simple point to be made is that he thought the best way to resolve these difficulties was by imposing conformity and ordered uniformity. At this point it is also worth briefly sketching out Locke's intellectual reaction to the same problem. As Marshall has recently emphasised Locke's experience of the disorders of the Revolution had led him initially to subscribe to Hobbes' position of the necessity of uniformity as an antidote to the social dangers of all forms of religious diversity.¹¹ By the late 1660s then, in his engagement with Stillingfleet, and most succinctly in the LCT Locke abandoned this stance in favour of an argument that embraced an almost complete relaxation of control over public expression. So between 1651 and 1689, from the Hobbist position to the Lockean, the response to the problem of religion had shifted from the absolute necessity of uniformity to a rejection of such a position. Traditionally this shift from authority to toleration has been regarded as part of a conceptual progress towards modernity: the two positions have been treated as essentially opposed. Put at its crudest 'bad' authoritarian arguments were displaced by good 'liberal' ones. By exploring the contextual relationship between the two authors I hope to suggest a far closer convergence between the intentions and objectives of these men.

Rather than recapitulating the complete ecclesiological structure of Hobbist and Lockean arguments the intention is to explore the margins of their arguments about the duties of authority and the rights of belief. Put in other words the question posed to each thinker might be phrased in the following terms: what are the limits of tolerable belief? If the question is posed in this manner, rather than the more commonplace inquiry of asking what are the rights of individual belief (which almost immediately relegates Hobbes to the position of 'illiberal' theorist), then it may be possible to rethink the relationship between the two men. As we will

⁷ See Ashcraft (1992); Marshall (1992, 1994); See also Wootton (1989).

⁸ See Champion (1992).

⁹ See Clark (1985, 1989, 1993).

¹⁰ See de Krey (1995).

¹¹ See Marshall (1994).

see both Hobbes and Locke were concerned with far more than the positions and rights of individuals but worried at the problems of what might be called the social implications of the relationship between knowledge and power. So the problem of 'toleration' might be posed not just as an issue of individual rights but as a discussion of more fundamental debates about the social construction of order.¹²

Until recently it has been difficult to turn to Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) with any hopes of encountering arguments for toleration and liberty of conscience. Ryan and Tuck have however suggested not only that it is possible to discover a 'more tolerant Hobbes', but also that this defender of 'libre-pensez' may have collaborated with Locke in the Restoration in supplying the campaign for relief to tender consciences surrounding the renewal of the Conventicle Act with intellectual defences.¹³ It will be my purpose here to tease out some of the ways it might be possible to read Hobbes as a tolerationist: in making this case it is important to note that it is not only Hobbes' literary texts that provide such evidence but also his life and disposition. In order to reconstruct the tolerant Hobbes it will be necessary to focus upon two themes: first his attitude towards the nature of commonplace conformity, and second his prescriptions for the treatment of heretics and atheists. Put in other words, the intention is to explore Hobbes (and later Locke's) attitudes to the public nature of religious practice and expression, in contrast to his understanding of the liberties of private expression and internal belief.

The clearest way of illustrating Hobbes' views on the question of the nature of public religious behaviour is to explore his discussion of the actions of Naaman the Syrian in *Leviathan* Chapters 42 and 43. The first discussion of Naaman was introduced to illustrate Hobbes' response to the question of the extent of Christian duties to the commands of an infidel sovereign: 'what ... if a King, or a Senate, or other Sovereign Person forbid us to believe in Christ?' For Hobbes the case was clear: such forbidding had no effect 'because Beleeve, and Unbeleeve never follow mens Commands. Faith is a gift of God, which man can neither give, nor take away by promise of rewards or menaces of torture'. Public proscriptions of true doctrine could not effect private faith. Hobbes took the question one obvious step further: 'what if wee bee commanded by our lawful Prince, to say with our tongue, what we beleeve not; must we obey such a command?' Once again Hobbes was incisive deploying the Old Testament example of Naaman (II Kings 5. 17). The latter, captain of the host of the King of Syria, was 'a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper'. Cured upon the advice of the Prophet Elisha (by washing in the Jordan seven times) Naaman, as Hobbes wrote 'was converted in his heart to the God of Israel'. Although converted from the idolatry of his Syrian sovereign ('thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering, nor sacrifice unto other Gods but unto the Lord') Naaman asked Elisha for permission 'to bow myself in the house of Rimmon'. Surprisingly Elisha gave Naaman such liberty. Hobbes took this 'liberty of Naaman' as a key means of illustrating the difference between public practice and private belief. As he pointed out 'here Naaman beleeved in his heart: but by bowing before the idol Rimmon, he denied the true God in effect, as much as he had done with his lips'. Surely this contravened 'our Saviours saying, whosoever denyeth me before men, I will deny him before my Father which is in Heaven'. But Hobbes denied that what to many contemporaries must have looked like hypocrisy was 'repugnant to true, and unfeigned Christianity'. The 'licence' of Naaman was crucial for Hobbes. The question of his bowing to the idol of Rimmon, was for Hobbes not an issue of theological correctness but an issue of sovereignty: 'that action is not his, but his Sovereigns'.¹⁴ Indeed Hobbes went on to expand the point to encompass the duties of obligations of all believers to their sovereigns insisting on complete obedience: 'and when the

¹² See Tully (1993).

¹³ See Goldie (1991)

¹⁴ Hobbes *Leviathan* 343-44.

Civill Sovereign is an Infidel, everyone of his own Subjects that resisteth him, sinneth against the laws of God'.¹⁵ Rebutting at length the classic statement of the duties of the Christian conscience towards heretic rulers as articulated by his *bete noire* Cardinal Bellarmine, Hobbes insisted that 'Christians are to tolerate their Heathen Princes'.¹⁶ Here it is apparent that Hobbes inverted the commonplace expectations of a language of toleration: it is not the individual whom is tolerated but the civil authority. In effect Hobbes argued that all public expression of religion was empty of spiritual significance: it was soteriologically neutral or meaningless. The wider purpose of these arguments was to disenfranchise both the private conscience and the clerical body from attempting to 'judge' the religious legitimacy of the sovereign.

At one level then it is apparent that Hobbes proposed a profoundly conformist model of public religion. Citing the licence of Naaman, all believers, whether Christian, Jewish, Mahometan or otherwise, were bound to obey publicly authorised religion. Importantly however Hobbes did not consider this unbending obligation as a type of intolerance. Crucial to his understanding was the distinction between public and private religion. Hobbes had no objection in theory to the principle of a diversity of religions within any particular state. Indeed in Chapter 12 he had applauded the model of the Romans who 'made no scruple of tolerating any Religion whatsoever in the City of Rome itselfe; unless it had something in it, that could not subsist with their civil government'.¹⁷ Toleration limited by the imperatives of civic order was acceptable: indeed it might be possible to suggest that by personal inclination Hobbes approved of an ecclesiological structure that allowed a liberty of public worship proximate to the 'independency of the Primitive Christians'. The citation of the precedent of the alternatives Churches of 'Paul, or Cephas, or Apollos' suggested that Hobbes ultimately approved of a system of public religion where worship was practised 'every man as he liketh best'.¹⁸ The unorthodoxy of this position was apparent to Hobbes: and he ensured that such passages, which were in clear contradiction to the established Church settlement, were excluded from later editions of the work.¹⁹

Hobbes' understanding of liberty of thought rested upon a rigorous distinction between the public and the private. Faith was 'internal and invisible' not subject to any public restraint: 'interior cogitations' were not subject to the commands even of God.²⁰ Hobbes made the distinction between internal and external worship transparent in Chapter 31 'The Kingdom of God by Nature': 'Publique, is the worship that a commonwealth performeth, as one person. Private, is that which a Private Person exhibiteth. Publique, in respect of the whole commonwealth is free; but in respect of Particular men it is not so'.²¹ To reinforce the point Hobbes continued 'Private is in secret Free; but in the sight of the multitude, it is never without some restraint, either from the lawes, or from the opinion of men; which is contrary to the nature of Liberty'. In private then Hobbes suggested that belief was unrestrained and more importantly unmonitored: as long as this internal understanding remained unpublished in the broadest sense it was acceptable. Once again the dynamic of restraint was not directed against any theoretical opposition to diversity but against the social effects of challenges to constituted doctrinal authority. This commitment to an almost Kantian understanding of the freedom of the intellect can (for example note Hobbes citation of Matthew 10.28 'Fear not those that kill the body, but cannot kill the soule'²²) also be explored in his attitudes to heresy and atheism. As recent scholars have shown Hobbes had a personal interest in discussions about the nature

¹⁵ *ibid* 314.

¹⁶ *ibid* 99-400.

¹⁷ *ibid* 83.

¹⁸ *ibid* 479-80.

¹⁹ See Wright (1991).

²⁰ *ibid* 414, 198.

²¹ *ibid* 249.

²² *ibid* 403.

of heresy and its just punishment given the close scrutiny the Church gave his writings in the 1660s.²³ Although very concerned to affirm that no individual should deliberately flout an authoritative command upon grounds of religious dissidence Hobbes was equally concerned both to rebut Anglican arguments that insisted the civil authority had a duty to proscribe heretics and also that common law defined heresy as an offence harmful in its nature and thus subject to law. Heresy was 'nothing else but a private opinion, obstinately maintained, contrary to the opinion which the publique person ... hath commanded to be taught'. Determining whether heretics should be punished was to be left to the sovereign: there was no theological ground for persecution only the calculations of civil protection and security. Indeed, as Hobbes was to argue in his historical account of the 'origins' of heresy, the modern conception of the danger of heresy was a fabrication of the priests. For Hobbes heresy (and perhaps atheism also) was simply a matter of error not a direct affront to God which required a forced edification: as he wrote 'unbelief is not a breach of any of his lawes; but a rejection of them'.²⁴ This is not the place to attempt to document all Hobbes remarks upon heresy and atheism, nor to attempt to categorise his own beliefs, but it is important to note that Hobbes was profoundly tolerant (in the sense that he did not feel the passionate need to discipline others' opinions) of private heterodoxy. Although Hobbes had an exact and detailed soteriology (see Chapter 43) this model of 'true religion' was not something that either a Church or a State might impose upon the individual: any restraints that were imposed upon the individual were undertaken under the injunctions of civil order and would fall into the same category as other socially deviant actions such as murder, theft or fraud. In Hobbes' reading of the divine purpose temporal institutions were irrelevant to eschatology: salvation was to be achieved by God's election and 'faith' not by any association with an earthly Church or by a public profession of belief. Civil religion was a social act disconnected from conscience. Needless to say, such an account was regarded as deeply suspect by Hobbes contemporaries.²⁵

II

Discovering arguments for toleration in the writings of John Locke is a much more straightforward enterprise: although understanding the contextual meaning or intention of such arguments is problematic. The young Locke of the *Two Tracts* had been firmly committed to supporting the duties of obligation: religious conscience had no right against established authority. From the late 1660s Locke began to contrive a defence of the liberty of religious expression: as he wrote in the *Essay Concerning Toleration* (*ECT*) (1667) in matters of religion 'every man hath a perfect, uncontrollable liberty which he may freely use ... provided always that it be all done sincerely, and out of convenience to God, according to the best of his knowledge and persuasion'.²⁶ In a number of key texts (especially the *ECT*, the understudied *Critical Notes on Stillingfleet* and the three *Letters Concerning Toleration* (*LCT1-3*)) Locke explored the intertwined themes of freedom of worship, the inability of any public body (Church or State) to have infallible knowledge of true religion, and the non-discretionary character of human belief. For convenience sake it will be necessary to focus initially upon the first *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) (*LCT1*). Locke premised his arguments upon exactly distinguishing 'the business of civil government from that of religion'.²⁷ Arguing against both Anglican theories of persecution and forms of Hobbist erastianism, Locke boldly stated 'there is absolutely no such thing, under the Gospel, as a Christian Commonwealth'.²⁸ Since religious societies were voluntary then no one who held a

²³ See Milton (1993).

²⁴ *Leviathan* 198.

²⁵ See Goldie (1991).

²⁶ Wootton (ed) *Political Writings* 190-191.

²⁷ *LCT1* (1889 edition) 5.

²⁸ *ibid* 25.

belief sincerely ought to suffer civil disability, punishment or persecution: this toleration was radical encompassing non-Christians. As Locke explained 'neither Pagan nor Mahometan, nor Jew, ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the Commonwealth, because of his religion'.²⁹ Two of the central planks of Locke's case were based upon his understanding of the ethics of belief and the 'argument from ignorance'.³⁰ The latter argument which made the connection between Locke's more general epistemic arguments and the fallibility of human knowledge to suggest that neither magistrates nor priests had any superior epistemological skill or ability to identify truth: true belief 'cannot be looked upon as the peculiar profession of any one sort of men'.³¹ Given that there were a 'great variety of ways that men follow' to claim knowledge of the singular route, and then to try and impose it, was erroneous.

Indeed attempts to impose necessarily fallible models of worship was, for Locke, not only illegitimate but also pointless. Contrary to Hobbes and his own earlier thinking, Locke argued that imposition and uniformity were the root causes of civil disorder: diversity of opinion would bring peace.³² The second plank of his defence was also closely related to the theme of the pointlessness of persecution from a soteriological position.³³ The telos of religious worship was 'the acquisition of eternal life'. Religious conviction could only be generated effectively by the individual: neither could doctrine be imposed nor borrowed. Each religious opinion had to be the product of sincere and careful inquiry: 'faith only, and inward sincerity, are the things that procure acceptance with God'.³⁴ Being forced to acknowledge doctrine or worship that conscience rejected was soteriologically dangerous: 'no way whatsoever that I shall walk in against the dictates of my conscience, will ever bring me to the mansions of the blessed ... I cannot be saved by a religion that I distrust and by a worship that I abhor'.³⁵ Any belief that was generated by sincere inquiry 'by meditation, study, search and his own endeavour' was legitimate. This was why pagans, mahometans and Jews might be tolerated: the native Americans should be tolerated as 'long as they are persuaded that they please God in observing the rites of their own country and that they shall obtain happiness by that means'. All sincere believers should be 'left unto God and themselves'.³⁶

It is perhaps worth pausing here to highlight the differences between Hobbes and Locke on the nature of public religion. To recapitulate, for Hobbes the content of religion was prescribed from above, obligation to it was complete but was soteriologically insignificant: the case of Naaman illustrated how one might preserve inner integrity with public conformity. For Locke the latter was anathema. In one sense Locke agreed with Hobbes; enforced public religion was soteriologically redundant. For Locke however this was a powerful argument against the value of such imposition since all true religious expression had to be the product of voluntary and unimpeded inquiry. So for Locke the process of conviction was as important, if not more so, than the content of any belief. Since it is impossible to securely and publicly identify the 'true' religion, the determinant of veracity is, for Locke, to be located in the process of faith. True belief is thus not found by discovering the propositional nature of religion but by the act of sincere and careful enquiry: Naaman's actions were coerced therefore insincere. Locke's theory of public toleration appears to be robust and radical, in clear contrast to Hobbes: in the words of one recent commentator Locke's defence of

²⁹ *ibid* 35.

³⁰ See Passmore (1978); Rogers (1992).

³¹ LCT1 16.

³² *ibid* 36-7.

³³ See Waldron (1991) who misses Locke's point about the soteriological ineffectiveness of persecution.

³⁴ LCT1 9,18.

³⁵ *ibid* 18.

³⁶ *ibid* 23-24.

toleration is 'genuine'.³⁷ Other commentators have repeatedly pointed out the limitations of Locke's arguments casting doubts upon his lineage with the traditions of Millian liberalism. For example John Dunn has astutely underscored the matter by emphasising that Locke's defence is of a freedom of worship rather than of a more fundamental freedom of thought or speech.³⁸ Indeed throughout the LCT1 the language of liberty is closely associated with a language of worship: in one sense it is almost possible to argue that individuals only attracted rights to a liberty of worship by attachment to 'Churches' or some form of public profession of their faith.³⁹ The intolerance in Locke's position is to be found in his exclusion of some systems of belief from acceptability: most important his complete rejection of atheism.⁴⁰ As a general principle Locke insisted 'no opinions contrary to human society, or to those moral rules which are necessary to the preservation of civil society are to be tolerated by the magistrate'. Thus, Catholics with their allegiance to Papal authority were excluded along with those 'who deny the being of God'. As Locke underlined the 'taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all'. Because atheists would not be bound by 'promises, covenants and oaths' they were a threat to the very bonds of human society.⁴¹ Locke thought atheists were mad to be 'shut out of all sober and civil society'.⁴² Locke's statements in the LCT1 are short and to the point: historians have generally taken them at face value. Consequently the exclusion of atheists has tended to corrode the pristine nature of Locke's proposed modernism and expose the theological foundations of his arguments. Contextualising Locke's thoughts on atheists might uncover a different purpose to the LCT1.

Whom did Locke mean when he placed 'atheists' outside of the sanctuary of tolerance? What defined 'atheism'? As Hunter has shown the language of atheism was commonly used in a very imprecise manner including or excluding those who denied God's existence, His providential care for humanity, the authenticity of the Scriptures, materialists, mortalists, sceptics, and epicureans. Commonly atheism might be regarded as practical immorality or speculative impiety. However such a language was construed it was typically used to vilify alternative or threatening accounts of competing religious truths.⁴³ Locke's passage on the subject in LCT1 is short and pithy: atheists are simply those that 'deny the being of God'. This given Locke's usual commitment to rigorous exhausting exposition seems odd. Turning to the rest of LCT1 it is possible perhaps to accent the purpose of this succinctness: Locke defined atheism in such a restricted way because he wanted to broaden the category of speculative opinion that could be embraced within legitimate belief. For example, in contending that 'the magistrate ought not to forbid the preaching or professing of any speculative opinions in any Church', Locke gave as examples of tolerable opinion not only Catholic transubstantiation but also the denial of the New Testament by Jews, and even more directly stated 'if a heathen doubt of both Testaments, he is not therefore to be punished as a pernicious citizen'.⁴⁴ It should be noted that defending the authenticity of Scripture was central to all of the major acts of legislation against blasphemy between 1648 and 1697. From other sources it is possible to reconstruct Locke's attitude to religious heterodoxy. As will be discussed in more detail below his correspondence with Philip Van Limborch showed his interest in the opinions

³⁷ Farr in Deitz (ed) 190-91.

³⁸ See Dunn (1991); Mendus (1988).

³⁹ See LCT1 (1880) 9-11. Of course the Lockean notion of a Church was very distinct from contemporary assumptions as will be argued in detail below.

⁴⁰ The exclusion of Roman Catholicism was as a corrosive political doctrine rather than a pure theological deviance. Locke (although he found them personally repugnant) had no problems in tolerating sincere men who believed in Catholic doctrines such as transubstantiation or purgatory.

⁴¹ LCT1 (1880) 30-1.

⁴² Yolton (23) cited from the *Vindication of the Reasonableness*.

⁴³ See Hunter (1985, 1991).

⁴⁴ LCT1 (1880) 26.

of the unorthodox German Balthasar Bekker. As Hunter has illustrated Locke also took a particular interest in the case of the Scottish student Thomas Aikenhead who was executed for heterodoxy in 1697. Locke's collection of legal materials relating to the case were interestingly originally labelled under the title 'toleration': these documents would have made it very clear to Locke that Aikenhead was at the extreme margins of heterodoxy.⁴⁵ Locke also used the concept of atheism in a far more unusual way: as early as the *Essay concerning toleration* (1667) he had suggested that it was the 'doctors of your several Churches' who by their attempt at 'defining and undertaking to prove several doctrines which are confessed to be incomprehensible' who 'must needs make a great many atheists'.⁴⁶ This was a theme that underpinned much of the lengthy third letter on toleration: the Church by the false imposition of unnecessary doctrine rather than moral teaching made, rather than restrained, impiety. Indeed in LCT3 Locke spent much time rebutting Proast's charge that toleration led to atheism and epicureanism; as he pointed out 'zeal for your own way makes you call all atheism, that agrees not with it'.⁴⁷

Turning back to LCT1 it is possible to bring to even greater prominence this attack on the clergy as intolerable by exploring the passages that are an immediate prelude to the discussion of atheism. To recount Locke's argument: no opinions should be tolerated which would corrode the bonds of human society. Just like Hobbes in Chapter 42 of *Leviathan*, Locke took immediate opportunity to revile Bellarminian defences of the papal deposing power. But in the same passage there are hints that Locke is slipping from a consideration of just Roman Catholic deviance. Negating the dictum 'that dominion is founded in grace' Locke continued to declare that 'These therefore, **and the like**, who attribute unto the faithful, religious, and orthodox, that is in plain terms, unto themselves, any peculiar privilege or power above other mortals ... I say these have no right to be tolerated by the magistrate'.⁴⁸ The point was reiterated a few paragraphs later: all 'other practical opinions, though not absolutely free from all error, yet if they do not tend to establish domination over other, or civil impunity to the Church in which they are taught, there can be no reason why they should not be tolerated'.⁴⁹ So impugnors of Holy Scripture tolerated, and good churchmen persecuted: it seems that perhaps there may be a very different way of reading the exclusion of atheists in LCT1 than merely assessing it in terms of Locke's failure of 'liberal' consistency. To clarify matters, there is no doubt that Locke genuinely despised men who denied the existence of God: given his hedonic psycho-soteriology, atheists (in his narrow sense) could simply not be bound to society. The hope of reward in heaven was a central plank of the Lockean social order in stark contrast to Hobbes' psychological erasure of the issue. It is also clear that in denying toleration to atheists Locke was judiciously removing one potential stick with which his tolerant position might be attacked: it was a sensible, and, given his belief that atheists were socially dangerous, easy sacrifice to make.

III

'Churchmen of all sorts, with power are very apt to persecute and misuse those that will not pen in their fold' wrote Locke in the 'Critical Notes upon Stillingfleet'.⁵⁰ Historians have spilt much ink in trying to identify the confessional position that provoked Locke's work. Dissenter or Anglican, latitudinarian or freethinker, are merely some of the alternative labels that have

⁴⁵ See Hunter (1992). Many thanks to Professor Hunter for sharing this point with me.

⁴⁶ Wootton (ed) 210.

⁴⁷ *Works* (4th edition, 1740) volume II 455- and following.

⁴⁸ LCT1 (1880) 31.

⁴⁹ *ibid* 32.

⁵⁰ Marshall (1992) 268.

been fixed to Locke.⁵¹ The LCT1 has been a classic case in point. Does it represent Locke's defence of dissent or even more precisely a defence of the French Protestants? Or is it part of a more rationalistic low Church tradition, or even a fledgling bird of the Enlightenment flock? Many of these labels have been devised as part of a historical response to political philosophers attempting to capture or reprimand LCT1 for some other proleptic project than the one for which it was designed. It is difficult to imagine Locke embracing any of the labels with enthusiasm. Let us take a different tack and imagine as most contemporaries must have done that the authorship of LCT1 was anonymous: would the first inclination be to remark upon the philosophical originality of the defence of toleration? Or would another theme strike the ear with much more timbre? One contemporary reaction to LCT1 might be that, rather than being a discussion of the principles of toleration, or a discourse on the sins of persecution, that it is a text that attempted to redefine the nature of the 'church'. In attempting to re-determine the nature of the church, Locke was profoundly committed to exposing the corruption of nearly all contemporary claims to the title of 'the Church', whether popish, Protestant, dissident or independent. In this ambition, as will be discussed below, Locke shared many things with Hobbes.

A hint of one of the common themes can be found in both Hobbes and Locke's citation of Christ's dictum to Pilate 'My Kingdom is not of this world' (John 18. 33-37) to the end of undercutting any clerical power to the contemporary church derived from apostolic times. The Biblical text was the coda of Chapter 42 'Of Power Ecclesiastical' of *Leviathan*; it prefaced Locke's attempt to undercut priestly Christianity in the ⁵²*Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695). This hint can be amplified if close attention is focused upon the language of the LCT1. Locke played his opening gambit by posing the simple address of intention: 'Let us now consider what a Church is'.⁵³ The Church was 'free and voluntary society': its members and associates determined the nature of its constitution for themselves. 'No body is born a member of any Church': churches were then contingent and mutable dependent upon the historical constituency of its members.⁵⁴ Locke immediately rebutted those who might object that the 'true Church' must have 'in it a Bishop, or Presbyter, with Ruling Authority derived from the very Apostles, and continued down unto the present times by an uninterrupted Succession', with the Biblical passage (Matthew 18.20) 'Wheresoever two or three are gathered together'. For Locke there was certainty that the latter example was competent 'unto the Salvation of Souls'. The stress upon 'Divine Institution' and 'continued Succession' in matters of Church government was the cause of division and dissent. Here Locke's rejection of commonplace clerical assumptions was radical. One can almost hear petulance in his request to objectors: 'let them shew me the Edict by which Christ has imposed that Law upon his Church. And let not any man think me impertinent if, in a thing of this consequence, I require that the terms of that Edict be very express and positive'.⁵⁵ Here, perhaps to emphasise Locke's radicalism, it should be remembered that Hobbes had himself spent much time discussing the precise meaning of the word 'ecclesia'. Locke himself commented that the 'Name of the Church, which was so venerable in the time of the Apostles, has been made use of to throw Dust in peoples Eyes'.⁵⁶ In this passages Locke drew a clear contrast between what he termed the 'Church of Christ' and 'Ecclesiastical Communion'. The frequency of use of the word 'ecclesiastical' in a pejorative sense litters the rest of the LCT1: Locke suggested that those who clamoured and contended ('that cry out continually the Church the Church') for 'the Decrees of their own society' were similar in motivation as those 'Ephesian Silversmiths'

⁵¹ See Ashcraft (1992); Marshall (1992, 1994)

⁵² Works Vol II 544.

⁵³ LCT1 Tully (ed) 28.

⁵⁴ *ibid* 8-9

⁵⁵ *ibid* 29.

⁵⁶ *ibid* 37.

who idolised Diana (Acts 19.34).⁵⁷ Locke continued in detail to expose the 'Ecclesiastical character those who claimed a distinction from the rest of mankind 'whether they be Bishops, Priests, Presbyters, Ministers, or however else dignified or distinguished'. Although reluctant to enter into an enquiry into their historical origins Locke insisted 'whence-soever their Authority be sprung' is was only 'ecclesiastical' and therefore had no authority in 'civil affairs'.⁵⁸ Things ecclesiastical were entirely different from things civil: 'he jumbles Heaven and Earth together, the things most remote and opposite, who mixes these two Societies'. It was hardly surprising that Jonas Proast accused Locke of showing 'ill will' to the clergy.⁵⁹

The LCT1 undermined traditional notions of the Church and clerical authority: it was not a low church or dissenting repost to Anglican sacerdotal conceptions, it was an entire rejection of all spiritual authority. Denying the apostolic institution of episcopacy or presbytery undercut both high and low churchmanship. It is difficult to underestimate the radicalism of this position. Although articulated in precise, moderate language, with careful Scriptural citation Locke ultimately argued the Church as contemporaries would have understood it did not exist. Importantly in the LCT1 Locke was committed to dissolving clerical or 'ecclesiastical' power for very similar reasons to Hobbes. Given Locke's belief that only consensual religious belief was soteriologically efficacious a persecuting and imposing priesthood would corrupt true religion and ultimately social harmony: it was crucial then that the Church as an institution had to be neutralised. For Hobbes, although soteriological imperatives were placed to one side, priestly ambition with its manipulation of popular fears interfered with the effectiveness of the civil sovereign's imposition of order. Indeed Locke on occasion used Hobbes' language to describe the way priestcraft had contaminated religion. Man's 'fearful apprehensions' had delivered them in to the care of the priests who had filled 'their heads with false notions of the Deity, and their worship with foolish rites ... and what dread or craft once began, devotion soon made sacred, and religion immutable'.⁶⁰ Although Marshall has recently drawn attention to Locke's anticlerical arguments, the link with Hobbes critique of the Church has not been prominent. Locke's audit of 'priest power' was not a dispassionate investigation: his was a furious opposition to clerical zeal and the 'zealots'.⁶¹ Indeed this hostility to clericalism, to zeal and persecution can be explored in Locke's more private thoughts and writings: of particular interest is the correspondence between Philip Van Limborch and Benjamin Furly, two men of quite distinct religious tempers.

As Goldie has shown Limborch was intimate with Locke's views on toleration; the publication of his own history of the Inquisition was connected with the LCT3. The unifying theme that bound the two texts and two authors was a vivisection of 'zelus theologicus'. Of especial interest in the correspondence was Locke's concern for details of the ecclesiastical treatment of the heterodox German Bekker, a Frisian pastor, author of *De betooverte Wereld* (1691). In an exchange of letters that ran parallel and beyond discussion and preparations for the publication of Limborch's work on the Inquisition, and Locke's LCT3, the case investigating Bekker's heresy was discussed in detail.⁶² The Synod of North Holland had accused Bekker of atheism and undermining the authenticity of Scripture. Bekker had denied the influence of the Devil and evil spirits in the world past or present. For his pain he was to suffer the 'ancient malady' of persecution. To Locke the attack on the sincere (if misguided)

⁵⁷ *ibid* 30.

⁵⁸ *ibid* 33.

⁵⁹ See LCT3 334; also LCT1 Tully 34 that he did not intend to detract from clerical dignity.

⁶⁰ *Works* volume II *Reasonableness* 573; see 580 for 'priestcraft'.

⁶¹ See Wootton (ed) 233; LCT1 Tully (ed) 36 and *passim*.

⁶² The correspondence concerning Bekker ran between July 1691 and October 1692: of particular interest are 1409, 1429, 1447, 1456, 1473, 1485, 1493, and 1553. For a short account of Bekker see P.Hazard *The European Mind* 200-204.

Bekker was a classic case of the dangers of 'ecclesiastical tyranny'. Because Bekker's ideas were not commonplace and touched upon heterodox subjects he could not escape 'the famous name of heretic'. Bekker was encouraged to recant his views, to accept that he had 'treated the word of God too irreverently', but ultimately refused and was suspended from his living. The themes that Locke and Limborch discussed were familiar: persecution was illegitimate and something not confined to the Roman Catholic Church as the case of Bekker illustrated. As Limborch clarified 'I detest persecution, not because it is popish, but because it is contrary to the spirit of the Christian religion: so whether Rome or Geneva sets it up, for me it is alike condemned'.⁶³ Reading the correspondence it is almost possible to feel some sort of resonance with Hobbes' worries in the 1660s and 1670s about the legal position of heresy; after all in terms of the legal establishment much of Locke's own Scriptural researches might have been regarded as dangerously unorthodox. In contrast to the careful, committed and moderate nature of the language in the letters between Limborch and Locke the epistolary intercourse between the latter and Benjamin Furly was far more robust and wanton in expression: the keynote was explicit anticlericalism.

As the work of Berti has shown Furly's house in Rotterdam was at the epicentre of the early Enlightenment: his circle was almost certainly involved in the production of subversive clandestine manuscripts like the *Traité des trois imposteurs*.⁶⁴ Association with heterodox men rubbed off onto Furly's discourse: he was unashamed to claim the name of heretic for himself.⁶⁵ Furly's lengthy letters of the early 1690s repeatedly rail against the pollution of true religion by priestcraft. As he wrote himself in May 1694 he greedily grasped 'at all opportunities offered me to expose those two words CHURCH, and HERETICK; as two of the most pernicious words that have for above 1000 years obtained amongst mankind'.⁶⁶ His ambition was to open 'mens eyes to see through the Tiffany cover of their [the Priests'] fulsome Authority'.⁶⁷ He wrote to Locke citing the latest arguments against ceremonies, or requesting for further news on unorthodox Biblical criticism by men like Richard Simon.⁶⁸ Furly was nothing if unrestrained in his reproaches against 'ecclesiastick gall' and the 'bugbear' of clerical authority.⁶⁹ There is little evidence that Locke ever reprimanded Furly for the intemperance and impiety of his attack upon the Church: if the second and third letters on toleration are examined it is apparent that the attack on priestcraft so central to Furly's correspondence also manifested itself in Locke's public work.

The most recent account of the specific context and meaning of Locke's extensive and lengthy engagement with Proast has indicated how the second and third letters were responses to the defeat of comprehension and a robust assault upon the High Church combined with the more positive theme of the promotion of a latitudinarian emphasis upon moral reformation and pastoral care.⁷⁰ The critique of the High Church at times spilt over into fundamental invective against any priesthood. Locke had denied Proast's insistence that only 'proper ministers of religion' could identify true religion in the second letter: interestingly this was exactly the phrase that Hobbes had abandoned between *De Cive* and *Leviathan*.⁷¹ In the third letter LCT3 Locke devoted much more attention to the nature of clerical authority: as Goldie has shown this was partially with the intention of promoting the moral function of the church along the lines advanced in Gilbert Burnet's popular but controversial *A Discourse of the Pastoral Care*

⁶³ Letter 1640.

⁶⁴ See Berti (1992).

⁶⁵ Letters 1672, 1684.

⁶⁶ Letter 1745 63.

⁶⁷ Letter 1702 3.

⁶⁸ See Letters 1371, 1392, 1407, 1408, 1469, 1480, 1533 etc.

⁶⁹ Letters 1702, 1745.

⁷⁰ Goldie 'Locke, Proast and religious toleration'.

⁷¹ See LCT2 (1880) 61; also Tuck.

(1692). Clerics who merely preached obligation produced 'ignorant, loose, unthinking conformists' rather than Christians. Indeed even 'the exactest observers, the most zealous advancers of conformity, may be, as irreligious, ignorant, and vicious, as any other men'.⁷² If any thing the practise of the current ecclesiastical establishment led to hypocrisy rather than piety. In the latter half of the letter Locke moved from a consideration of contemporary Churches and churchmen to an historical account of the origins of 'ecclesiastical' power. Contesting Proast's allegations that the Church was enfranchised to use magisterial force after the decline of miracular conversion, Locke maintained that there were 'very narrow limits' to Christ's power. Rhetorically, Locke exclaimed 'Could not our Saviour impower his Apostles, to denounce, or inflict punishments on careless or obstinate unbelievers, to make them hear and consider?'.⁷³ But Christ eschewed both force and miracles: 'the Gospel, 'tis plain, subsisted and spread itself, without force'.⁷⁴ Much in the fashion of other radical polemicists, Locke denounced Proast's false history. There was no 'succedaneum' from an age of miracles to an age of magisterial force: to suggest so was to make 'a new church-history for us'. Interestingly, Locke cited, Proast's non-juring associate Henry Dodwell whose researches on Irenaeus gave evidence of miracles after the time of Constantine.⁷⁵ The historical arguments in LCT3 were the opportunity for Locke to develop his anticlericalism: the form it took was proximate to some of the very heterodox arguments advanced by men like Charles Blount and other near contemporaries like John Toland, John Trenchard and Robert Howard. In *Great is Diana* (1679) Blount had traced the origins of idolatry to the influence of a tyrannical liaison between priestcraft and monarchy.⁷⁶ In a series of radical passages Locke enunciated an equivalent analysis. Uncorrupted by priests man naturally had the potential for true religion: Noahic practise was an exemplar. An examination of history led Locke to believe that priests and kings were in complicity: the origins of idolatry lay in Thoth's manipulation of the funeral rites of Osiris.⁷⁷ Here Locke's intimacy with Isaac Newton, with whom he corresponded about matters hermeneutic, was important. It was about this time that Newton was working on his 'Origins of the Gentile Religion': a text that indicted the treasonable relationship between civil and religious tyranny.

As Locke's private and unpublished manuscripts show, Locke was hostile to all forms of *de jure divino* arguments for Church government. In the 'Critical Notes' Locke went to great lengths to show that both non-conformist and established ecclesiologies were equally illegitimate. All ecclesiastical offices, rules and powers were 'meerly prudential'; there was no 'modell absolutely prescribed by God almighty'. Scripture gave no hints on the true nature of the primitive Church: 'the Scripture say so little or nothing at all about it'. All claims to divine determination were usually premised upon false patristic history: the case for episcopacy was particularly suspect.⁷⁸ It is worth stressing the extremity of this view. Locke severed all contemporary ecclesiastical government from the models of primitive Christianity: this was in direct contradiction to the commonplace Protestant *mentalité* that was rooted in an ever more sophisticated historical primitivism. For men like Henry Dodwell, Gilbert Burnet or even Edward Stillingfleet the legitimacy of the current ecclesiastical establishment could be tested against the accurate reconstructions of historical scholarship.⁷⁹ For Locke such histories were traditionally fraudulent, and ultimately since Scripture did not prescribe a model of Church

⁷² LCT3 434-5, 347.

⁷³ LCT3 466

⁷⁴ *ibid* 467.

⁷⁵ *ibid* 467-74. On Proast and Dodwell see Goldie (1993).

⁷⁶ See Champion (1992).

⁷⁷ *ibid* 485-90.

⁷⁸ Many thanks to John Marshall for detailed discussion on the 'Critical Notes'. See Marshall (1994) 98-108 for the best account in print of this manuscript and its significance.

⁷⁹ For some discussion of the relationship between historical scholarship and ecclesiological argument see Champion (1992).

government, even true histories brought no prescriptions with them. It is difficult to imagine any of the more mainstream religious positions accepting Locke's negation of the apostolic continuity of the Church. Indeed further evidence for the radicalism of Locke's views (and a radicalism that took him much closer to the tradition of books III and IV of *Leviathan*) can be found in the 1698 fragment on 'sacerdos'.⁸⁰ The manuscript, perhaps a commentary on Bayle's *Pensees*, opens with a discussion of the nature of magisterial authority in matters indifferent that draws upon the themes of LCT1. The text then took a Hobbist turn: when Christianity became a 'national religion' it also became because of magisterial imposition 'the cause of more disorders, tumults and bloodshed, than all other causes put together'. This was not the legacy of Christ: 'Antichrist has sown those tares in the field of the Church'. The cause of disorder (again the passages echo *Leviathan* chapter 29) was that 'the clergy, by degrees, as Christianity spread, affecting dominion, laid claim to a priesthood, derived by succession, and so independent from the civil power, receiving (as they pretend) by the imposition of hands ... an indelible character, particular sanctity, and a power immediately from heaven to do several things which are not lawful to be done by other men'. But as Locke pithily put it Christ was the 'last priest'.

There were no 'footsteps in Scripture' for *sacerdos*: it was neither necessary nor convenient. As Locke continued, pre-empting the arguments of Republican authors like Toland, Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, the priests soon rewarded 'princes for their doing their drudgery' by 'preach[ing] up monarchy jure divino'. In this way priestcraft was not only spiritually dangerous but a civil sin: 'ordination, that begins in priesthood, if it be left alone, will certainly grow up to absolute empire'. Although Locke might in public acknowledge his membership of the Church of England, his private conceptions of priesthood and ecclesiastical authority were such that many contemporaries were acute in suggesting an element of heterodoxy in his subscription.

IV

Many years ago, in much underrated work A. Seaton commented that Locke had managed to make a conceptual separation of Church and state but had not broken the link between religion and the state. Interestingly Seaton continued to suggest that Locke wrote 'primarily neither as a Churchman, nor as a non-conformist, but as a philosopher'.⁸¹ By trying to read Locke within a Hobbist context it is certainly possible to endorse Seaton's suggestions that Locke wrote 'neither as a Churchman, nor as a non-conformist'. Locke did, however, still write from within the precincts of theology. The precise nature of this theological position can be illuminated by highlighting some of the continuities and differences between Hobbes' and Locke's understandings of ecclesiology and ideas of toleration. Ignoring the clear differences in political philosophy it is possible to bring the two thinkers in to closer harmony by exploring the function of anticlericalism in the broader context of their thought. Although both Hobbes and Locke were hostile to the claims of clerical authority the motivation for such animosity was distinct. Hobbes negated the role of the Church by emptying public religion of any soteriological meaning: priests became servants of the state. Locke on the other hand stressed the salvific value of public worship but denied that priests had any role in that practice. In effect, as Figgis pointed out many years ago, in Hobbes and Locke it is possible to see the two different implications of 'erastianism'. In Hobbes the erastian position is from above: the *regnum* commands the *ecclesia*. In Locke *laicus* supplanted *sacerdos*. Both were attempts to disable clerical interference in civil society.

⁸⁰ I am very grateful to Dr M.A. Goldie for providing me with a transcript of the text: see his forthcoming collection.

⁸¹ Seaton (1911) 269, 273.

Both men opposed the 'priest power': it is important to be clear exactly how hostile Locke was to hierarchy. But, to underscore the point, this is not to suggest that Locke managed to abscond from the problems of the confessional state entirely. Indeed by comparing Hobbes' and Locke's views about the limits placed upon the toleration of private belief it is feasible to suggest that it was the former rather than the latter who made to more complete break with the injunctions of Christianity. Perhaps the point can be most clearly made by posing two interrelated questions: why did Locke despise priestcraft and at the same time exclude atheists from even private toleration? The answers are connected and to be found in Locke's understanding of toleration. Commonly 'toleration' is thought to refer to a liberty of thought or practise: it is a question of allowing someone a faith, or sexuality or sensibility. When we 'tolerate' someone in this sense we simply withdraw restraints from their actions or beliefs. There are however two senses of the word: this first suggests a 'permission granted by authority' the withdrawal of 'authoritative interference or molestation'. It is this sense that Locke's LCT has traditionally been understood. There is however a second meaning which might reflect Locke's intentions more accurately: 'forbearance', and 'to bear without repugnance' may be closer a closer reading of what Locke meant by the language of toleration. This reading is rooted in an understanding of Locke's 'socinianism'. This label is used in an imprecise theological way: it is not intended to simply refer to any particular doctrinal position but as Toland put it, to describe an intellectual disposition. What John Toland, in *The True Nature of Socinianism* (1705), called 'indifference'. 'Socinianism' used in this sense was a means of coming to religious understanding. That is something more than merely applying 'reason' to Scripture but a form of hermeneutic *praxis* that can be amply explored in Locke's devotion to biblical criticism as a semi-communal activity. Examining his many exchanges of letters with Toinard, Leclerc, Furlly and most importantly Newton it is clear that the language of these exchanges was one of careful inquiry: how might this passage or that variant be understood. The point is that this 'socinianism' was not a system of closed doctrine (remember Locke, writing to Limborch, insisted he subscribed to no 'system') but a disposition to further investigation.⁸² Returning to the questions posed above may illuminate the point.

Why did Locke, unlike Hobbes, place limits on the privileges of opinion and exclude atheists from toleration? For Hobbes private opinion was unknowable and therefore unpoliceable. The inner state of mind of any individual (as long as this did not lead to corrosive public demeanour) was irrelevant to either the sovereign or any other individual. For Locke, however, belief was not just a matter of opinion but of faith. Given his understanding of the capacities of human reason, the disposition of God, and the hedonic nature of humanity, for Locke the process of coming to 'belief' was part of a religious hermeneutic. So for Locke it was not so much a question of what beliefs one held, but how one actually arrived at those positions.⁸³ In this sense it was crucial to tolerate everyone not just in the more commonplace sense of the word, but also in the second meaning. All beliefs, as long as they were acquired with sincerity and careful investigation, were tolerable. Given Locke's conception of this process of 'careful and intent' enquiry, it was inconceivable to him that 'atheists' were tolerable: put simply they were wilfully ignorant and therefore must be corrected. As discussed above, beyond this extreme, many other opinions were tolerable. This was the precise point where Locke's conception of the exclusion of atheists also informed his proscription of clerical imposition. Since the process of critical inquiry was given (almost) sacramental status, any interference with that performance was intolerable. Locke's hostility towards priesthood was not just a Hobbist fear of a corrupting institution, but also a theologically driven disgust. Priests not only destabilised civic order but also meddled with the theological principle of inquiry. Locke's theory of toleration was then behavioural rather than doctrinal: 'free unbiased enquiry' was a religious imperative rather than a liberal

⁸² See Letter 1901. See also my review of Marshall (1994) *The Locke Newsletter* 25 (1994).

⁸³ See 'Error' from Goldie transcripts.

aphorism. 'Toleration' for Locke was a form of practical Christianity: a recommendation for a religious practice that firmly ran counter to the institutions of established worship. Importantly the promotion of this vision of the 'church' not only disabled the ecclesiological value of the Royal Supremacy (Isaiah 49) but also any claims to uniformity and imposition based upon Luke 14.23.⁸⁴ It is this 'theological' grounding that distinguishes Locke from Hobbes: it was also a theological position that placed him far distant from the Churches of his day.

⁸⁴ See Goldie (1991) on the importance of 'compelle intrare' to the Anglican tradition.

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